

## THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

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“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Many New Testament prophecies describe a turning away from the New Testament faith and the creation of false churches that follow man-made tradition and heresies instead of the pure doctrine of God’s Word. This is called apostasy, and the Bible says it will increase as the time of Christ’s return draws nearer. See, for example, Matthew 7:15-22; 1 Timothy 4:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:1, 5, 12-13; 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3-4.

On a trip to Israel in April 2010, we saw the fulfillment of these prophecies throughout Israel.

Practically every important geographical site is owned by some apostate church that enriches itself by this means. There is the Church of the Nativity with its Chapel of the Milk Grotto; the Church of St. Peter at Capernaum; the Basilica of the Annunciation at Nazareth; the Church of the Beatitudes on the Sea of Galilee; the Church of the Loaves and Fishes at Tabgha; the Church of the Miracle at Cana; Elisha’s Church at Jericho; St. Peter’s Church at Jaffa; and the Church of John the Baptist in Samaria, to mention a few.

In Jerusalem there are churches in the supposed places where Jesus prayed, where He allegedly fell, where He was imprisoned, where he was beaten, where the tree was cut for His cross, where He died, where He was buried, where He rose from the dead, even where Mary died. There is the Church of Our Lady of the Spasm, the Church of Mary Magdalene, The Church of Our Lord Weeping, the Basilica of the Agony, St. Veronica’s Church, and even Saint Peter’s in Gallicantu (which refers to the rooster that crowed the night Peter denied the Lord).

The preeminent showcase of false Christianity in Israel is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which sits on the alleged site of Jesus’ death and burial. Standing in the center of that church our guide gave an overview as follows:

“We are now inside the Holy Sepulchre Church. The church is occupied on one side by the Armenians; in the middle in the tomb and central nave by the Greek Orthodox; the rear end of the tomb belongs to the Copts; the area of the catacombs the Assyrian Church; where we are now standing near the rotunda, the Catholic Church; the Abyssinian or Ethiopian Church is on the rooftop. As the churches have a problem agreeing one with the other, the keys of the church are actually held by the Muslims, in the same family for 400 years. And

it all falls inside a Jewish state. On the way in we had to pass the Muslim mosque of Omar in order to get into the main entrance to the Holy Sepulcher Church.”

This is in perfect fulfillment of the New Testament prophecies. These “churches” are all apostate. They preach a false gospel of sacramentalism and works. My son-in-law, who grew up in a staunch Hindu family in South Asia, observed that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre “is just like Hinduism.” There are idols and icons galore, priests decked out in impressive robes, incense, candles, bells, holy places, holy relics, holy pilgrimages, bowing down to images, kissing them, getting blessing from them.

In fulfillment of 2 Timothy 4:4, there are religious myths in abundance.

There is the myth of Mary’s suffering with Christ. The 13th Station of the Cross, which is inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, features an image of Mary with a cross piercing her heart, depicting the myth that she participated in Christ’s suffering for mankind.

There is the myth of Mary’s sinless birth, of her ascension to Heaven, of her crowning as Queen of Heaven.

There is the myth that every Easter a holy flame appears in the tomb of Jesus at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. From this flame the Christian pilgrims light bundles of 33 tapers for blessing and luck. (There are 33 to signify the 33 years of Christ’s earthly life.)

There is the myth that religious objects can be fortified with spiritual power by placing them on the holy sites.

This is the fable-loving Christianity that is described in New Testament prophecy by Jesus and His apostles.

It is also prophetically significant that there is a push for unity within Christianity today. The philosophy of unity is operating among liberal and “evangelical” Christians, as well. Even at the Garden Tomb, which is operated by an evangelical Protestant organization, ecumenism is the prominent philosophy. Our guide there was a Baptist, but he said that he works with Protestants, Orthodox, and Catholics, and they get along fine because they don’t “argue about doctrine.” This is apostasy. The Bible says that sound doctrine is preeminent (2 Timothy 3:16) and God’s people are commanded to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The ecumenical philosophy is the leaven that is bringing all branches of Christianity together into one apostate loaf.

## **MARK TWAIN’S DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE**

The following is from Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1867:

“Entering the building, through the midst of the usual assemblage of beggars, one sees on his left a few Turkish guards--for Christians of different sects will not only quarrel, but fight, also, in this sacred place, if allowed to do it.

“All sects of Christians (except Protestants,) have chapels under the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and each must keep to itself and not venture upon another’s ground. It has been proven conclusively that they can not worship together around the grave of the Saviour of the World in peace. ...

“As we moved among the great piers and pillars of another part of the church, we came upon a party of black-robed animal-looking Italian monks, with candles in their hands, who were chanting something in Latin, and going through some kind of religious performance around a disk of white marble let into the floor. It was there that the risen Saviour appeared to Mary Magdalen in the likeness of a gardener. Near by was a similar stone, shaped like a star--here the Magdalen herself stood, at the same time. Monks were performing in this place also. They perform everywhere--all over the vast building, and at all hours. Their candles are always flitting about in the gloom, and making the dim old church more dismal than there is any necessity that it should be even though it is a tomb. ...

“We were shown the place where our Lord appeared to His mother after the Resurrection. Here, also, a marble slab marks the place where St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, found the crosses about three hundred years after the Crucifixion. According to the legend, this great discovery elicited extravagant demonstrations of joy. But they were of short duration. The question intruded itself: ‘Which bore the blessed Saviour, and which the thieves?’ To be in doubt, in so mighty a matter as this--to be uncertain which one to adore--was a grievous misfortune. It turned the public joy to sorrow. But when lived there is a holy priest who could not set so simply a trouble at rest? One of these soon hit upon a plan that would be a certain test. A noble lady lay very ill in Jerusalem. The wise priests ordered that the three crosses be taken to her bedside one at a time. It was done. When her eyes fell upon the first one, she uttered a scream that was heard beyond the Damascus Gate, and even upon the Mount of Olives, it was said, and then fell back in a deadly swoon. They recovered her and brought the second cross. Instantly she went into fearful convulsions, and it was with the greatest difficulty that six strong men could hold her. They were afraid, now, to bring in the third cross. They began to fear that possibly they had fallen upon the wrong crosses, and that the true cross was not with this number at all. However, as the woman seemed likely to die with the convulsions that were tearing her, they concluded that the third could do no more than put her out of her misery with a happy dispatch. So they brought it, and behold, a miracle! The woman sprang from her bed, smiling and joyful, and perfectly restored to health. ...

“Not far from here was a niche where they used to preserve a piece of the True Cross, but it is gone, now. This piece of the cross was discovered in the sixteenth century. The Latin priests say it was stolen away, long ago, by priests of another sect. That seems like a hard statement to

make, but we know very well that it was stolen, because we have seen it ourselves in several of the cathedrals of Italy and France. ...

“The Greek Chapel is the most roomy, the richest and the showiest chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. ... But the feature of the place is a short column that rises from the middle of the marble pavement of the chapel, and marks the exact centre of the earth. The most reliable traditions tell us that this was known to be the earth’s centre, ages ago, and that when Christ was upon earth he set all doubts upon the subject at rest forever, by stating with his own lips that the tradition was correct. Remember, He said that that particular column stood upon the centre of the world. If the centre of the world changes, the column changes its position accordingly. This column has moved three different times of its own accord. ...

“If even greater proofs than those I have mentioned are wanted, to satisfy the headstrong and the foolish that this is the genuine centre of the earth, they are here. The greatest of them lies in the fact that from under this very column was taken the dust from which Adam was made. ...

“It is a singular circumstance that right under the roof of this same great church, and not far away from that illustrious column, Adam himself, the father of the human race, lies buried. ...

“The next place the guide took us to in the holy church was an altar dedicated to the Roman soldier who was of the military guard that attended at the Crucifixion to keep order, and who--when the vail of the Temple was rent in the awful darkness that followed; when the rock of Golgotha was split asunder by an earthquake ... and said, ‘Surely this was the Son of God!’ ...

“In this altar they used to keep one of the most curious relics that human eyes ever looked upon--a thing that had power to fascinate the beholder in some mysterious way and keep him gazing for hours together. It was nothing less than the copper plate Pilate put upon the Saviour’s cross, and upon which he wrote, ‘THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.’ I think St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, found this wonderful memento when she was here in the third century. She traveled all over Palestine, and was always fortunate. Whenever the good old enthusiast found a thing mentioned in her Bible, Old or New, she would go and search for that thing, and never stop until she found it. If it was Adam, she would find Adam; if it was the Ark, she would find the Ark; if it was Goliath, or Joshua, she would find them. She found the inscription here that I was speaking of, I think. She found it in this very spot, close to where the martyred Roman soldier stood. That copper plate is in one of the churches in Rome, now. ...

“We passed along a few steps and saw the altar built over the very spot where the good Catholic priests say the soldiers divided the raiment of the Saviour.

“Then we went down into a cavern which cavilers say was once a cistern. It is a chapel, now, however--the Chapel of St. Helena. ... In this place is an altar dedicated to St. Dimas, the penitent thief. A new bronze statue is here--a statue of St. Helena. ...

“From the cistern we descended twelve steps into a large roughly-shaped grotto, carved wholly out of the living rock. Helena blasted it out when she was searching for the true Cross. She had a laborious piece of work, here, but it was richly rewarded. Out of this place she got the crown of thorns, the nails of the cross, the true Cross itself, and the cross of the penitent thief. When she thought she had found every thing and was about to stop, she was told in a dream to continue a day longer. It was very fortunate. She did so, and found the cross of the other thief. ...

“Still marching through the venerable Church of the Holy Sepulchre, among chanting priests in coarse long robes and sandals; pilgrims of all colors and many nationalities, in all sorts of strange costumes; under dusky arches and by dingy piers and columns; through a sombre cathedral gloom freighted with smoke and incense, and faintly starred with scores of candles that appeared suddenly and as suddenly disappeared, or drifted mysteriously hither and thither about the distant aisles like ghostly jack-o’-lanterns--we came at last to a small chapel which is called the ‘Chapel of the Mocking.’ Under the altar was a fragment of a marble column; this was the seat Christ sat on when he was reviled, and mockingly made King, crowned with a crown of thorns and sceptered with a reed. ...

“We passed on, and halted before the tome of Melchisedek! You will remember Melchisedek, no doubt; he was the King who came out and levied a tribute on Abraham the time that he pursued Lot’s captors to Dan, and took all their property from them” (Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1867).

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